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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the teaching-learning process can be transformed to accurately define good schools where students achieve (and improve) academically, presenting transformation ideas that are encapsulated in a hypothetical ideal school. To transform the teaching-learning process, students must be self-motivated, teachers must be dedicated to excellence, parents must be equal partners, communities must be self-directed, and governments must be involved. There must be a belief that every child can learn. In an ideal school, all students' potential would be maximized to the fullest. Diversity among both students and teachers would be highly valued, and opportunities for growth would be created by well-prepared teachers. The ideal school would have four basic operational dimensions: functioning with a Comprehensive Support Model, becoming a learning community, becoming a place to master the craft of teaching, and fostering a multidimensional teaching-learning process. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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Transforming Teaching-Learning to Improve Student Achievement

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Abstract

We have witnessed tremendous challenges in our society. These challenges call for demographic shifts in powers and paradigms on how schools respond to individual and collective growth. In an effort to address current challenges, we have misdefined "good" students, "good" teachers, and "good" schools. The question then is, How can the teaching-learning process be transformed to accurately define "good" schools where students achieve academically? In this presentation, I respond to this critical question. Embedded in my response are transformation ideas that are encapsulated in what I call MY DREAM SCHOOL.

Transforming Teaching-Learning to Improve Student Achievement

> "How can I teach these kids? They can't pay attention!" An insistent whine of complaint rises and gathers like a sinister haze over classrooms from preschool through college. Rather than serving as a warning, however, it has become a smoke screen for teachers and parents who belabor the young for failing to learn, and for politicians and professors who take potshots at the schools. While the adult community sanctimoniously bewails erosion of academic rigor and achievement, however, it perpetuates the practices that are shortening children's attention spans and rendering their brains unfit to engage in sustained verbal inquiry. Meanwhile, the schools, inundated with students who can't listen, remember, follow sequences of directions, read anything they consider "boring," or solve even elementary problems, have resorted to classifying increasing numbers of students as educationally sick. (Healy, 1990, p. 137)

Healy's notations above reiterate perpetual inconsistencies in efforts to transform the teaching-learning process in the United States. These inconsistencies are reflected in frequent complaints about how students learn, how teachers teach, how parents respond, how communities support, and how state and federal governments legislate. Despite these rhetorics, education is still the most important tool to uplift the citizenry. Dewey (1958) emphasized that education and democracy cannot be divorced from each other. In other words, education has the power to change human beings. As he pointed out:

> Education must have the tendency, if it is education, to form attitudes. The tendency to form attitudes which will express themselves in intelligent social action is something very different from indoctrination. . . . There is an

> intermediary between aimless education and the education of inculcation and indoctrination. The alternative is the kind of education that connects the materials and methods by which knowledge is acquainted with a sense of how things are done; not by impregnating the individual with some final philosophy, whether it comes from Karl Marx or from Mussolini or Hitler or anybody else, but by enabling him [her] to so understand existing conditions that an attitude of intelligent action will follow from social understanding. (p. 56)

Since education is important in advancing the society, it is imperative that we transform the teaching-learning process to improve student achievement. Such a transformation will not be successful unless we redefine what we mean by "good" students, "good" teachers, and "good" schools (Obiakor, 2000). The question then is, How can the teaching-learning process be transformed to accurately define "good" schools where students achieve academically? In this presentation, I respond to this critical question. Embedded in my response are transformation ideas that are encapsulated in what I call MY DREAM SCHOOL.

Transforming the Teaching-Learning Process

To transform the teaching-learning process, students must be self-motivated, teachers must be dedicated to excellence, parents must be equal partners, communities must be self-directed, and governments must be involved. We cannot be victims of our circumstances! We cannot give up!! We must BE INNOVATIVE!!!

From my perspective, a true transformation will come when we stop politicizing education, and we begin to do whatever it takes to educate *all* students. In their book, *Every Child, Every School: Success for All*, Slavin, Madden, Dolan, and Wasik (1996) wrote:

Every child can learn. Every school can ensure the success of every child. Statements to this effect appear in goals statements, curriculum reports, and school district offices. They are posted in school buildings and appear as mottoes on school stationery. But does our education system behave as if they are true? If we truly believed that every child could learn under proper circumstances, we would be relentless in the search of those circumstances. We would use well-validated instructional methods and materials known to be capable of ensuring the success of nearly all children if used with intelligence, flexibility, and fidelity. We would involve teachers in constant, collaborative professional development activities to continually improve their abilities to reach every child. We would frequently assess children's performance to be sure that all students are on a path that leads to success, and to be able to respond immediately if children are not making adequate progress. If children are falling behind despite excellent instruction, we would try different instructional approaches and if necessary, we would provide them with tutors or other intensive assistance. We would involve parents in support of their children's school success; we would check to see whether vision, hearing, health, nutrition, or other nonacademic problems were holding children back, and then we would find a solution to those problems. If we truly believed that all children could learn, we would rarely, if ever, assign children to special education or long-term remedial programs that in effect lower expectations for children. If we truly believed that all schools could ensure the success of all children, then the failure of even a single child would be cause for great alarm and immediate, forceful intervention. (p. xi)

I believe transforming the teaching-learning process is painstaking, but it is not impossible. My ideas about transformation are fully reflected in what I call MY DREAM SCHOOL. For instance, in my dream school, all students' potential will be maximized to the fullest. My dream school will be neither (a) a *White* school nor a *Black* school, (b) a *Latino* school nor an *Asian American* school, (c) a *Native American* school nor a *special* school, (d) a *rich* school nor a *poor* school, (e) a school for *smart people* nor a school for the *not-so-smart people*. My dream school will be a *good* school where all the above flourish, that is, a school where opportunities and choices for growth are created by well-prepared teachers who understand the true meaning of the teaching profession. Simply put, in my dream school, teachers will be truly *good* teachers who have the courage to teach with their real pedagogical power (Dewey, 1958; Henderson & Bibens, 19790; Hilliard, 1992, 1995; Johnson, 1981; Kohl, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Orlich, Harder, Callahan, & Gibson, 2001; Palmer, 1998). In my dream school, "culture" will be a noncontroversial phenomenon that increases the *goodness* and *quality* of school and classroom activities. In fact, my dream school will:

1. Be located in all neighborhoods (i.e., suburb, urban, rural, and inner-city areas).
2. Have minority and majority students to reflect demographic shifts.
3. Have minority and majority teachers to reflect demographic shifts.
4. Have culturally competent teachers.
5. Produce culturally competent students.
6. Be dedicated to excellence.
7. Believe in "quality with a heart."
8. Have teachers with "soul."

9. Respond to student stressors and individual differences.
10. Address issues of student learning styles and multiple intelligences.
11. Encourage all students to maximize their potential.
12. Empower parents and community members in all their activities.
13. Work collaboratively, consultatively, and cooperatively with parents despite their cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
14. Not get rid of students indiscriminately.
15. Try its best to educate *all* students.
16. Prepare students to be responsible and productive citizens through self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-empowerment.
17. Prepare students to be nationally and globally aware.
18. Go beyond traditions to be creative.
19. Be abreast of the times on how it hires its administrators.
20. Have administrators who care for students.
21. Make multiple voices to be heard in classroom activities.
22. Not support making some students *invisible*.
23. Create and maintain learning communities.
24. Not be puritanic (i.e., a perfectionist mentality).
25. Have truly *good* teachers who will teach *reality*.

Operational Dimensions of My Dream School

Based on the aforementioned details, it seems clear to me that my dream school will have four basic operational dimensions, namely:

1. It will function with a Comprehensive Support Model (CSM).

2. It will become a learning community.

3. It will become a place to master the craft of teaching.

4. It will foster a multidimensional teaching-learning process.

Functioning with a Comprehensive Support Model

Everyone wants a dream school that can meet the needs of *all* students! My dream school will be a truly *good* school where best practices are manifested in all educational programming for *all* students. In such a school, the COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT MODEL (CSM) must flourish. Based on the CSM, the "self," family, school, community, and government will be collaboratively and consultatively involved. The "self" will be involved because without the personal powers of all entities involved in learning, self-responsibility may not be maximized. The family will be important because it is the cornerstone of the student and the bridge that connects the student with the school. The school will be a part of the CSM because it will have teachers and professionals who have the power to shift their paradigms regarding demographic changes. The community will be an important part of the CSM because it will provide a variety of opportunities and choices for children and youth, parents, schools, and governmental entities to come together. To make the CSM work, the government will not divorce itself from the happenings in families, schools, and communities. Governmental entities will be involved in generating equitable policies that entice the multiple voices of its citizenry.

In my dream school, *all* components of the CSM will listen to each other and communicate as they empower each other. THE BLAME GAME WILL BE OVER as diverse positive forces collaborate, consult, and cooperate for the *common good*. In my dream school, the whole village will be at work because "it takes a *responsible* village to raise a *responsible* child" (see Obiakor, 1994). The Milwaukee Catalyst (1998) reiterated these ideas to press for

effective educational reforms based on research. This organization highlighted five essential supports for school learning that must be in place to improve school-community relationships. These key forces include:

1. Effective school leadership.
2. Family-community partnerships.
3. A school environment that supports learning.
4. Effective staff development and collaboration.
5. A quality instructional program. (p. 1)

As the Milwaukee Catalyst concluded, "Making practices like these a reality requires major changes—not only in the classroom but also in the way the entire school is run and in its ties with students, families, and the community. Making these changes allows the schools to focus their resources and attention on improving teaching, learning, and student achievement for all children" (p. 2). In my dream school, community forces will be an integral part of its daily functioning. We will not ignore any part of the whole village!

Becoming a Learning Community

In my dream school, the focus will be on maintaining a learning community. According to Peterson (1992), "community in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique. When community exists, learning is strengthened—everyone is smarter, more ambitious, and productive. Well-formed ideas and intentions amount to little without a community to bring them to life" (p. 2). He added:

> Life in a learning community is helped along by the interests, ideas, and support of others. Social life is not snuffed out; it is nurtured and used to advance learning in the best way possible. Learning is social . . . . The position taken is

> that learning awakens a variety of internal processes that operate only when the child is interacting with others in his [her] environment and in cooperation with his [her] peers. Even mainstream educators are beginning to recognize that education fails when it focuses solely on the accumulation of demonstrable facts and skill. An image is taking shape that acknowledges a more complex and irreducible phenomenon, the social person. (p. 3)

My dream school will be a learning community where learning is shared with a *heart*. In such a learning community, life in the classroom will be less intense and there will be fewer restrictions. A well-organized learning community leads to holistic teaching. As Peterson (1992) concluded, holistic teaching entails:

1. *Teacher orientation* to help students to grow in complicated and critical ways.
2. *View of knowledge* to help people to construct meaning through experiences.
3. *Meaning-centered teaching* to help knowledge to be personalized as people search for meaning.
4. *Skills* to help to negotiate, express, and develop knowledge.
5. *Curriculum* to help connect students' lives to learning.
6. *Connectedness* to help students to build upon what makes sense to them.
7. *Collaboration* to help students and teachers learn together.
8. *Accountability* to help students to be accountable for their own learning and teachers to be accountable for what they do in the classroom.
9. *Students* who participate in planning and evaluating their education.

10. *Competence* to demonstrate how people express meaning, solve problems, work with others, and critique intelligently.

Becoming a Place to Master the Craft of Teaching

Good teachers are *good* students. In my dream school, teachers will know what it means to be a teacher, and they will value their profession as change agents. Many years ago, Dewey (1960) explained that:

> Constant and uniform relations in change and a knowledge of them in "laws," are not a hindrance to freedom, but a necessary factor in coming to be effectively that which we have the capacity to grow into. Social conditions interact with the preferences of an individual (that are his or her individuality) in a way favorable to actualizing freedom only when they develop intelligence, not abstract knowledge and abstract thought, but power of vision and reflection. For these take effect in making preference, desire, and purpose more flexible, alert, and resolute. Freedom has too long been thought of as indeterminate power operating in a closed and ended world. In its reality, freedom is a resolute will operating in a world in some respects indeterminate, because open and moving toward a new future. (p. 287)

Based on Dewey's statement, in my dream school, teachers will search for answers to problems. In other words, *good* teachers will get liberated when they master their craft through preservice and inservice trainings. Since my dream school will be made up of diverse students and teachers, individuals who refuse to leave their comfort zones and/or shift their paradigms will be unhappy campers. Simply put, in my dream school, learning will be a continuous process of

development! Guillaume, Zuniga-Hill, and Yee (1995) postulated that teachers of diverse students should:

1. Develop a knowledge base about diverse ethnic groups and have multiple opportunities to examine personal attitudes toward students of color.
2. Develop culturally and linguistically supportive strategies and approaches that make learning available and equitable for all students.
3. Have ample exposure to students of diverse backgrounds and to teachers who can model appropriate instructional approaches.
4. Commit to professional growth regarding issues of diversity. (p. 70)

I believe to understand teaching is to understand communication. In my dream school, teachers, principals, and school district personnel will learn to communicate with others. Teachers who are good imparters of knowledge may not necessarily be good communicators. Effective communication will create workplace success and mutual awareness (Harris-Obiakor, 2000). In my dream school, teachers will answer the following questions:

1. Why is effective communication so necessary?
2. What is communication all about?
3. What are the barriers that affect the communication process?
4. What are the tips for being a good communicator?

Good teachers must be good communicators. How many of us have ever wondered why students do not follow instructions? Maybe, students do not understand teachers' directions. As a consequence, in my dream school, teachers will:

1. Understand that communication is a two-way process between the sender and the receiver.

2. Be sensitive and aware.
3. Take great interest in others.
4. Be specific.
5. Keep messages clear in terms that will be understood.
6. Accept the fact that people do things for their personal reasons.
7. Adjust messages to meet circumstances.
8. Be sincere.
9. Know what they do not know.
10. Not be who they are not.

I am convinced that there are tremendous requirements and demands of being an educator (see Hoyle, 1975; Obiakor, Karr, Utley, & Algozzine, 1998). For example, Hoyle described these demands when he noted that:

> The teacher has a much wider public than his [her] pupils and colleagues. Outside the school a number of groups have their own expectations of the teacher's role. These groups include the parents of pupils, local counselors and others who have responsibilities for education, the members of various voluntary organizations which take an interest in education, and members of Parent-Teacher Associations. In addition, members of the public have their conceptions of the teacher. The degree to which these expectations directly impinge upon the teacher and shape his [her] conception of his [her] role varies from society to society. (p. 69)

These demands require that *good* teachers develop techniques to survive in today's changing world. In my dream school, teachers will possess "business beatitudes" (Beattie, 1982) that include character, enthusiasm, courage, responsibility, persistence, endurance, self-control,

integrity, confidence, knowledge, determination, ambition, teamwork, and wisdom. In such a school, teachers will be frantic as they (a) build the knowledge base, (b) examine the classroom culture, (c) plan and deliver instruction, (d) negotiate the roles of teaching, (e) build self-concepts through self-efficacy, (f) restructure learning environments, (g) enhance learning with technologies and resources, and (h) work beyond the classroom (see Obiakor et al.). Mastering the craft of teaching is to be aware of positive changes that lead to the *common good*. Surely, *good* teachers in my dream school will be ready to meet the challenges of the new century. They will expand their learning opportunities, value diversity, consult with families and community members, and provide needed support for collaborative systems. "As it appears, educators cannot afford to be divorced from their communities, and their communities cannot afford to be divorced from them. In sum, challenges that face communities will continue to be visible in schools, and the ways educators deal with these challenges will be particularly important in the years ahead" (Obiakor et al., p. 152).

Fostering a Multidimensional Teaching-Learning Process

As individuals are different so must the teaching-learning process. Ironically, this has not been the precedence in today's classrooms and schools. Our research and practice on effective schools and effective teaching have been somewhat confusing (Bliss, Firestone, & Richards, 1991). For instance, we talk about responding to individual differences as we teach, but very often, differences are viewed as deficits. In my dream school, we will not only talk about differences, we will use them to strengthen and beautify our classrooms. My experiences tell me that people consistently shift their paradigms to respond to society's changes. Additionally, my experiences tell me that those who refuse to shift their paradigms affect others with their

retrogressive behaviors—most frequently, people's futures are negatively affected. Consider Case 1 below:

Just a few years ago, on October 6, 1995, I was on one of my trips to present a paper at the Council for Children with Behavior Disorders International Convention in Dallas, Texas. Since I detested driving, I took a Greyhound Bus from Emporia to Wichita, Kansas, where my flight was scheduled to take off around 6 a.m. My bus left Emporia around 2:30 a.m. en route to Wichita. Around 3:00 a.m., the bus driver stopped at El Dorado for some rest time. I went briefly to use the restroom, and by the time I came out, the bus had left me at El Dorado. I was stranded and frustrated in the strange hours of the morning. My frustration rose because I did not want to miss my flight in Wichita. I began to talk to anyone who would listen at this rest area. I knew the dangers involved, but I had to take the risk. I asked people (I mean people of all races and cultures) who I saw for a ride to Wichita. Even the African Americans I asked did not respond—they ignored me. I lost hope until I asked a White man (Mr. C. W. Sisemore) who surprised me. He agreed. Remember, it was around 3:40 a.m. in the morning! This White man looked like a construction worker—he wore some mud-ridden "cowboy" clothes. I was dumbfounded that he accepted to give me (a Blackman) a ride this early in the morning. I thought that the well-dressed people, especially the African Americans, would accept to give me a ride, but I was wrong. Anyway, my newfound friend began to speed to catch the bus. We did not catch the bus, but we got there not long after the bus arrived in Wichita. Luckily, my luggage was still in the bus. Mr. C. W. Sisemore waited for me to get

my luggage, and he gave me a ride to Wichita airport where I took my flight to Dallas. I tried to give him some money to repay his kindness, but he refused.

Though this case appears a bit farfetched, many of today's teachers can learn from Mr. Sisemore. Even though I took a risk to ask for a ride in the early hours of the morning, he took a greater risk to give me a ride. Not only do such risks reduce stereotypes and generalizations, they also make long-term positive impressions on people. How many of us would demonstrate such courage when people are down? Who would have imagined that in these days of racial mistrust that a White man would give a ride to a Black man in the early hours of the morning? I am reminded of the biblical "Parable of the Good Samaritan" where the supposed *good* people left a man stranded and the unsuspected stranger saved him. As it appears, Mr. Sisemore had nothing to gain by giving me a ride, yet he took his time and risk to give me a ride. Teachers can learn a lot from him! In my dream school, teachers will take risks like Mr. Sisemore and be rewarded for taking them.

Consider another example in Case 2, the case of the "Danshiki Man" who frequently wore his African attire to depict his pride as a Black man of African descent.

The "Danshiki Man" was an African American who directed a Black program of a major university. He was known for his pride about Africa. In fact, he was the Faculty Sponsor for the Black Students' Union (BSU) and the Organization of African Students (OAS). For instance, he invited Africans to support his programs and wore African attire to school. As a result, the university administration never wanted to mess with him—they were scared that this man who knew so much about Africa would take them to task. Nobody tried to bother him! He was virtually free to do whatever he wanted to do. The "Danshiki Man"

had two daughters who were also students in the same university. These daughters were Beautiful, Black, *and* Brilliant *and commanded great respect on campus. Before long, one handsome Nigerian who was pursuing a graduate degree in chemical engineering got captivated by one of the "Danshiki Man's" daughters. He came from a rich royal family. He made a "pass" at her and she accepted. The two of them began to date and she started strategizing on how to introduce him to her family. The "Danshiki Man" heard through the grapevine that his daughter was dating a Nigerian. He confronted the daughter with the news and she honestly acknowledged that she was falling in love with this Nigerian. The "Danshiki Man" was angry and asked the daughter: "Why are you dating an African? Could you not see other African American men? Do you really know what you're doing? How will your kids look? Do you plan to live with him in the jungle? What will people say when they hear that my daughter is married to an African?" The daughter responded: "I thought you loved Africans, Daddy. I can't believe you are bigoted and closed-minded toward them." The "Danshiki Man" repeated: "I don't care what you say. Do not marry an African! African's are backward." Out of respect for the "Danshiki Man," the daughter stopped dating the Nigerian and their wonderful relationship ended. They were both emotionally devastated.*

Again, this case might be farfetched, but it depicts the fact that people of similar race can be closed-minded. Even though the "Danshiki Man" wore African attire to show his pride for Africa, he was phony. He preached what he never practiced. Some teachers play this kind of self-destructive game in schools today. They think that being multicultural means wearing

cultural attire, eating at "Taco-Bell," or using chopsticks to eat at Chinese restaurants. I am convinced that *good* teachers frequently go beyond tradition to challenge their thinking and action. *Goodness* must also go beyond race, culture, language, and socioeconomics. In my dream school, teachers like the "Danshiki Man" will be challenged, retrained, and retooled. Paley (2000) recounted her experiences in teaching a multicultural classroom. In doing this, she presented a model for self-examination of teacher prejudices. Such self-examination is necessary to help students reach for the *top*. In spite of personal-emotional challenges posed by her students, Paley remained "capable of setting the limits and confronting children with misperceptions, misunderstandings, contradictions, and self-destructive behavior" (Comer & Poussaint, 2000, p. x). As Paley pointed out:

> The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked about. It is not easy, because we are influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us. (p. xx)

In the teaching-learning process, my dream school's goal will be multidimensional and inclusive. Johnson (1981) and Halvorsen and Neary (2001) agreed that multidimensionality should be followed in responding to school order, student interest, school spirit, student discipline, classroom instruction, classroom discussion and mastery, planning class period, study skills, homework, classroom organization, behavior management, selecting and organizing intervals, organizing time, evaluating and testing students, reporting to parents and students, and dealing with written work of students. Even in designing new programs, multidimensionality should be the key! For example, the School District of Shorewood, Wisconsin (1997) offered

multiple programs to enrich the minds of its students. These programs included school newspapers, accelerated reader programs, battle of the books, junior great books, writers' club, literary club, young authors' conference, geography hunt, science fair, special projects, and stock market game. This district also offered a variety of educational activities to provide opportunities and choices for their students. These activities included accelerated courses (e.g., foreign language and orchestra); co-curricular activities (e.g., student council and play production); challenge program activities (e.g., international pen pals and quiz bowl); advanced classes (e.g., anthropology and physics); and extracurriculars (e.g., jazz ensemble and multicultural council). In my dream school, a variety of enrichment programs will be provided in an inclusive manner to maximize the fullest potential of students and to expose them to life's realities. Additionally, teachers who lead these activities will be rewarded through merit pay and other forms of professionally enhancing activities.

Conclusion

In this presentation, I have addressed how we can transform the teaching-learning process to improve student achievement. I believe transformation is painstaking, but it is not impossible. To transform the teaching-learning process, we must be willing to try new experiences; cope with changes; see different points of view; be open-minded; participate in group actions; challenge stereotypes; recognize "self" in relation to larger community; acknowledge quality; and respect other cultures, races, and beliefs. These ideas are encapsulated in what I call MY DREAM SCHOOL.

Today, we are witnessing tremendous challenges in our society. The critical question continues to be, "Are our schools ready to confront these challenges?" My answer is "Yes." We have the power to shift our paradigms if we are truly interested in uplifting individual and

collective growth. This growth will only materialize when we transform the teaching-learning process to improve student achievement. Our goal must be to educate every child—to do this, we must believe every child can learn. As a consequence, in my dream school, we will move beyond tradition on the ways we identify, refer, assess, label, categorize, place, include, and instruct students. Teachers will be *good*, but they will not be puritanic. They will be truly *good* teachers who know who they are, learn the facts when they are in doubt, change their thinking, use resource persons, build self-concepts, teach with divergent techniques, make the right choices, and continue to learn. In my dream school, a Comprehensive Support Model that values the contributions of the "self," families, schools, communities, and governments will be in operation. Additionally, this school will be a learning community where *quality* works with a *heart*. In such a school, teachers will continue to master the craft of teaching, and the teaching-learning process will be multidimensional.

Finally, my dream school will be a *good* school for the 21st century because it will maximize the fullest potential of *all* learners, *all* teachers, *all* parents, and *all* communities. In such a school, teachers will consistently be prepared to learn new ways of looking at students' experiences in their respective classrooms. Smith (1999) concluded that teachers seem unprepared "to give thought to the way students live through a given classroom learning experience, at least in terms beyond their behavioral manifestations and test scores" (p. xxxiii). Apparently, in my dream school, students' experiences will matter and the stories they tell will matter. Hopefully, these *new* stories will create *new* directions, *new* hopes, *new* visions, *new* paradigms, and *new* traditions. In the words of Smith:

> Tradition has it that standardized tests, classroom performances on tests, written assignments, special projects, and cumulative grade point averages are the tools

used to bracket students off as particular kinds of learners and knowledge seekers and creators. . . . such measurements of learning and knowing do not tell the complete story. Without the stories to illuminate the learning journey surrounding such measuring tools, it's not possible to fully understand if what was learned was done to satisfy oneself or someone else. Therefore, in the interest of promoting content mastery beyond a foundational level, assuming of course, that is the goal teachers wish their students to achieve, a curriculum embedded in narratives of its participants, I argue, is an invitation to discover the benefits derived from everyone's unique way of traveling through the classroom maze. (p. 153)

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